

ORAL TESTIMONY

**Testimony of Daniel Van Epp
President of The Howard Hughes Corporation
Regarding H.R. 4141:
The Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area Protection and
Enhancement Act of 2002.
Thursday, June 6, 2002
Before The House Resources Committee
Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation
and Public Lands.**

RED ROCK ENHANCEMENT ACT

Mr. Chairman... members of the subcommittee... thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the Red Rock Canyon Enhancement Act.

We appreciate the work of Congressman Jim Gibbons and his staff in crafting and introducing this bill to the House of Representatives... a bill that would enhance the Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area, and preserve significant viewsheds in the western Las Vegas Valley.

It would also set aside more than 1200 acres of ridgeline for use by Clark County as a passive park... and it would raise the level of protection for an additional 232 acres of BLM land surrounding a flood control basin adjacent to the Conservation Area, thus guaranteeing its permanent preservation.

For these reasons and many more, this bill is supported by the entire Nevada congressional delegation... local governments of Nevada... conservation groups... and other interested parties.

[pause] Our Company is developing the master-planned community of Summerlin on land acquired by Howard Hughes half a century ago.

Summerlin is America's most successful master-planned community, and when completed, it will be home to 160,000 Nevadans.

Our company was acquired in 1996 by The Rouse Company, recognized today as one of America's most successful real estate investment trusts.

The Rouse Company developed Columbia, MD... one of the first major master-planned communities in America. Other major successes include downtown revitalization projects such as Harbor Place in Baltimore and Faneuil Hall in Boston.

Summerlin covers more than 22 thousand acres and stretches along the western rim of the Las Vegas Valley, bordering public lands including the Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area.

A principal reason passage of this bill is so important, is that the boundary of

the federal land to our west is based on section lines, and so it does not conform to the well-defined foot of the mountains.

Thus it is that the very ‘toes’ or ‘shoulders’ of some of those mountains are ‘clipped’ by the current property lines.

A clear border is created where the mountain slopes meet the alluvial plain... forming a natural and desirable boundary between Summerlin and the Conservation Area.

The bases of those mountains that currently lie within Summerlin make up the bulk of the offered lands of this exchange proposal. Logic would dictate that if most of a mountain is under the protection of a conservation area, the entire mountain should be included, and that is precisely what this legislation addresses.

Our company takes great pride in the quality of Summerlin and guides its development with a strong environmental stewardship.

At Summerlin’s inception, approximately 5,000 acres of pristine land was transferred to the BLM through an exchange, creating what is today the gateway and buffer zone for the astonishingly beautiful Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area.

There are many other examples of our environmental leadership, including the use of water-saving landscapes... preservation of arroyos to maintain natural terrain while providing recreational opportunities... and design criteria that requires the use of color palettes indigenous to the desert, thereby reducing impact on the viewshed.

Most visitors to Las Vegas are well acquainted with the manmade grandeur of the “Strip”, but 15 miles to the west, our efforts in the creation of Summerlin are precisely the opposite . . . to preserve the natural beauty of the desert in harmony with responsible development.

[pause] While it is generally acknowledged that custom home lots perched on mountain slopes provide extraordinary high-value view-lots, the impact of such development on viewsheds is an issue. As profiled in media reports included in your packet, Hughes is dedicated to reducing that impact in our northwest holdings through this exchange.

This bill refers to an exchange of lands “of equal value”. That value is being determined by an appraisal conducted by a BLM-approved professional, using all applicable federal standards.

The process of gathering input on this bill has been open and inclusive, and we’ve initiated dozens of meetings with environmental leaders, government agencies, and community organizations. The result is widespread support from members of the local Sierra Club, The Nature Conservancy and numerous leaders of environmental and conservation groups in Southern Nevada.

We believe this bill is a prime example of constructive legislation... that engenders public consensus... and accomplishes multiple goals...

- It expands the National Conservation area.
- It protects and preserves the viewshed for the entire Las Vegas Valley.
- It improves access to the Conservation Area
- It creates a park for Clark County residents.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for your consideration and leadership. [4:40]